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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the difficulties primary teachers often encounter when trying to get their students to listen, this article presents two exercises that have proved effective in improving students' listening skills. The first exercise, "The Echoing Fishbowl," provides children with attentive listening experience by putting them in a situation in which, to be allowed to express their views, they must first listen to the previous speaker well enough to repeat the main ideas conveyed. The second exercise, "An Experiment in Communication," gives students concrete experience of one-way and two-way communication. It involves dividing students into pairs and having each student take a turn as both the giver and the follower of directions. The article details the procedures, evaluation, and materials needed for each exercise and emphasizes that, to teach listening skills effectively, instructors must first become good listeners themselves. (JD)

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THE ECHOING FISHBOWL OR HOW TO GET KIDS TO LISTEN

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"Stop talking and listen, please!"
"You are not listening to me!"
Louder and with more feeling,
"Now, LISTEN!"

How often do we as teachers cajole and plead for students to listen to us and to their classmates? We sometimes give careful directions for an assignment only to have two or three children ask, "How do we do this?" Even if we manage to have thirty pairs of eyes looking at us and silence prevailing, the children may still not be listening well.

If we eavesdrop on any teachers lounge in the nation, we will learn that teachers are very concerned about children's listening skills, and rightly so.

The causes of children's not listening are easily understood when we consider the sounds that surround them in their homes, shopping centers, and even their schools. There is always an abundance of sound--TV, "beautiful" background music, machines, conversations, and public address systems to name a few. Noises prevail in our own living rooms and kitchens around dinner time: adult conversation, toys, TV, mixers, timer bells, babies crying, children's talking, and dogs barking. It is very difficult to read and follow even the simple directions on a soup can or understand the headline in the daily newspaper when we are surrounded by such a din.

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Children who try to do their homework under such circumstances often cannot remember what they were supposed to do.

One of the survival skills for both children and adults is to learn how to turn off the inappropriate and turn on the appropriate sounds. For years we have assumed that children know how to listen just as they know how to walk and talk. We now know that children need instruction in how to listen if they are to be effective learners.

The purpose of this article is to present teachers with two exercises that have proven effective in improving students' listening skills.

The first exercise, the Echoing Fishbowl, puts children in a situation where they want to talk and to express their views, but where they must listen to the previous speaker well enough to repeat the main idea he or she tried to convey before giving their own ideas.

THE ECHOING FISHBOWL

Goal: To provide participants with an attentive listening experience.

Procedures:

1. Select a topic which you know will elicit controversy among your students.
2. Develop a continuum with extreme, opposing points of view. Make a chart or write on the board.

Example:

Holiday Horace		Vacation Val
(He wants longer holidays during the school year, even if school lasts until the end of July)		(She wants school to end earlier in the spring, even if there were no holiday time off)

3. Ask students to consider where they would place themselves on the continuum and list their names in the appropriate places.
4. Arrange a small circle of chairs in front of the room and ask for two or three volunteers from each side of the controversy to sit in the circle for a discussion. Place an empty chair in the circle for any other class members who want to add to the discussion after it gets started.
5. Explain the ground rules:
   Only those in the circle may speak. Each speaker must repeat the essence of what the previous speaker has said before speaking. She/he cannot state her/his opinion until the previous speaker feels an accurate statement of his/her comment has been given.
6. Begin by asking one student to state why she/he believes as she/he does. The teacher monitors the discussion to see that the ground rules are followed. The discussion continues until all participants have spoken at least once.

Evaluation:

Process the experience by discussing what happened to the students in the fishbowl.
Possible questions:

--What happened to your own ideas when you had to repeat what someone else had said?
--How did you feel when someone did not repeat your ideas accurately?
--How did you feel after that person did repeat your ideas accurately?
--Did you ever change your idea somewhat when you heard the next speaker quote you?
--How did this process change what you normally do in a discussion?

The second exercise gives children a concrete communication experience which illustrates the superiority of two-way over one-way communication.

AN EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNICATION

Objective: To provide students with the opportunity to experience one-way and two-way communication both as a giver and a follower of directions.

Procedures:

1. Give each pair of students four envelopes labeled in the following manner:

Exercise #1	
Partner A	Partner B
Envelope #1 Direction Giver	Envelope #1 Direction Follower
Contents: Sheet #1	Contents: Sheet #2

Exercise #2	
Partner A	Partner B
Envelope #2 Direction Follower	Envelope #2 Direction Giver
Contents: Sheet #3	Contents: Sheet #4

2. Instruct students to decide who will be A and who will be B; then have them open the appropriate envelope for Exercise #1 and follow instructions.

   Partner A. Envelope #1, Sheet #1, Direction Giver: You are to study the diagram below. With your back to your partner, tell him or her how to draw the diagram. No questions or repetitions are allowed.

   Partner B. Envelope #1, Sheet #2, Direction Follower: With your back to your partner, you are to draw a diagram exactly as he or she tells you. You may not ask questions or ask him to repeat.

3. Instruct students to begin Exercise #2 by open-

ing the appropriate envelopes and following the instructions.

Partner A. Envelope #2, Sheet #3, Direction Follower: You are to follow the directions given by your partner. In this exercise you may face your partner and ask questions if you do not understand the directions.

Partner B. Envelope #2, Sheet #4, Direction Giver: Study the diagram below. Face your partner and tell him or her how to draw the diagram. In this exercise your partner may ask questions.

4. Allow partners to compare the drawings to see how successful they were in the two exercises.

Materials Needed:

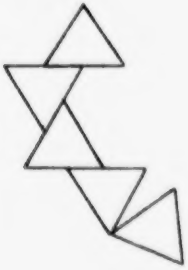
Run off sheets of paper with the following instructions at the top for Partners A & B:

Partner A. Envelope #2, Sheet #3, Direction Follower: You are to follow the directions given by your partner. In this exercise you may face your partner and ask questions if you do not understand the directions.

Partner B. Envelope #1, Sheet #2, Direction Follower: With your back to your partner, you are to draw a diagram exactly as he or she tells you. You may not ask questions or ask him or her to repeat.

Partner A. Envelope #1, Sheet #1, Direction Giver: You are to study the diagram below. With your back to your partner, tell him or her how to draw the diagram. No questions or repetitions are allowed.

Partner B. Envelope #2, Sheet #4, Direction Giver: Study the diagram below. Face your partner and tell him or her to draw the diagram. In this exercise your partner may ask questions.



5. After partners have compared their drawings, discuss with the class the following questions:

--Which way worked better in your pair?
--What does it mean that the second way was more successful? Is it easier to follow directions when you are allowed to ask questions?
--Does it make a difference when the direction follower can <u>see</u> the person who gives the directions?

Teaching listening through these and other exercises is an important step in developing good listeners. An equally important step, and probably a more difficult one, is to become good listeners ourselves. We need to check ourselves throughout the day to see how frequently we try to do something else while a child is talking to us, and thus are only half tuned in to what the child is saying.

Also, we should check ourselves while a child is talking to us. We should ask ourselves if we could repeat what he/she just said, at least the essence of it. If we cannot, we ought to ask the child to repeat what he/she just said because we are not sure we understand. By repeatedly doing this checking we will find that our own listening skills will improve, and we will also find the children will begin to do that too. Modeling is a powerful educational force, and we teachers who listen will have students who listen!